

The 8th International Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) Seminar - Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice

## ‘L2 Motivational Self Esteem’ and ‘Integrativeness’ among TEFL Students in Iran: A Qualitative Study

Hamid Roohbakhsh Far<sup>a,\*</sup>, Azizah Rajab<sup>b</sup>, Atika Etemadzadeh<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a,b,c</sup>Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 Johor, Malaysia

---

### Abstract

The present study investigated L2 motivation among TEFL students in Iran. ‘L2 motivational self-system’ reframed the dominant concept of ‘integrativeness’ within a broader domain conceived as ‘possible self’. This study also addressed this issue by conducting interviews with 16 TEFL students in their first and final years of study in Mashhad Azad University, Iran. After content analysis of interview transcripts, the results revealed that while ‘ideal L2 self’ might be a better indicator of final-year students’ motivation, it was not so for first-year students’ and could not be substituted by ‘integrativeness’.

© 2012 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the LSP 2012 Committee, Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

**Keywords:** L2 motivation; L2 motivational self-system; integrativeness; ideal L2 self; L2 learning

---

### 1. Introduction

Motivation is a key term, which language teachers use when they describe successful learners. Mastering a second language (L2) is a tedious process during which students’ motivation to continue is a key determinant factor in language learners’ success. Regardless of language aptitude, many language learners with high motivation can achieve high levels of language proficiency; whereas, without sufficient motivation even gifted learners cannot succeed in mastering an L2. During the past decades, language motivation has been the target of many studies in Applied Linguistics since many researchers have attached a key importance to it.

Empirical investigation on language motivation dates back to the pioneer works by Gardner and his colleagues in 1970s. During this period, two major categories were basic constituents of motivation: integrative

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: Tel: +6 019 7518104; fax: 07 5566911

E-mail address: [frhamid3@live.utm.my](mailto:frhamid3@live.utm.my)

and instrumental motivation. The former refers to “a desire to learn L2 in order to have contact with, and perhaps identify with, members from L2 community” [1]. In other words, Gardner [2] introduced integrative motivation as “a positive affect towards the other language community, or communities in general.” Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, was defined as “more functional reasons for learning a language: to get a better job or a promotion, or to pass a required examination” [3]. ‘Integrative motive’ or ‘integrativeness’ is perhaps the most researched concept of Gardner’s motivation theory. He characterized this motivation as follows:

“Integrativeness reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community. At one level, this implies an openness to, and respect for other cultural groups and ways of life. In the extreme, this might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one’s original group), but more commonly it might well involve integration within both communities.”

(Gardner, [4]: 5)

In a series of studies, Gardner and his colleagues (e.g. Gardner and Lambert, [5]; Gardner and Smythe, [6]) demonstrated that students with higher integrative motivation achieve higher levels of proficiency with more success. In other words, they viewed students’ interest to integrate with the culture of the target-language community as a powerful incentive to master a second language. Consequently, a model of second language acquisition that focused on learning another language in school was proposed. Despite the fact that it focused on the acquisition of the second language in formal contexts, a basic premise underlying the use of the concept, integrative motivation, was that second language acquisition involves the development of bilingual skill in the language. Therefore, it is different from other school subjects and is a “salient characteristic of another culture, as a consequence, the relative degree of success will be influenced to some extent by individual’s attitude toward the other community” [7].

However, findings of various studies yielded different results regarding integrative/instrumental dichotomy. Gardner and Lambert have studied mainly English-speaking learners of French in areas of North America where there is a community of French native speakers. Their results from these studies showed that learners with a higher integrative motivation are likely to achieve greater proficiency. The integrative learner would seek more social contact and be happier in adopting new speech patterns from the other group. However, Gardner and Lambert obtained different results when they studied learners of English in the Philippines. They found the level of the learners’ instrumental motivation correlated best with their success in second language learning. Lukmani [8] found the same when she studied learners of English in India. In both of these situations, English was learnt as an international language rather than with reference to a community of English native speakers; therefore, it is not surprising if integrative attitudes were not as significant as the learner’s instrumental reasons for mastering the language.

In 2005, Dornyei proposed a new model for language motivation, which shifted previous studies from social-psychological perspectives to more psychologically-oriented perspectives. Dornyei [9] developed a new conceptualization of the “L2 motivational self-system” which focused on the individuals’ vision of themselves in the future. Three major concepts constitute this model: ‘ideal L2 self’, ‘ought-to L2 self’, and ‘attitudes to learning a language’. ‘Ideal L2 self’ includes those attributes one would ideally like to possess and ‘ought-to L2 self’ signifies those attributes one believes one ought to possess. The basic tenet of the model is that if language learning is “integral to one’s ideal or ought-to self, this will serve as a powerful motivator to learn the language because of our psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between current and future self state” [10].

Highlighting the importance of second language motivation in general, and ‘integrative’ and ‘ideal L2 self’, in particular, this study has addressed this significance. New models of language motivation like ‘L2 motivational self-system’ proposed by Dornyei [9] have proposed language motivation in a broader conceptualization

conceived as ‘possible selves’ and have visualized ‘integrativeness’ to be better perceived by the concept of ‘ideal L2 self’ [10]. However, this new perspective does not suggest uprooting previous studies on integrativeness by neglecting the importance of students’ attitudes to target-language community and, consequently, a desire to integrate with it. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the significance of these two concepts, i.e. ‘ideal L2 self’ and ‘integrativeness’ in relation with students’ intended efforts to learn English. In so doing, the study utilizes interview questions to find which variable – ‘ideal L2 self’ or ‘integrativeness’ – is considered as more important by students.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

The samples for this study were 16 TEFL students in Mashhad Azad University. To provide some background about samples, it should be noted that all students studying in this university including the samples were local and there were no international students; therefore, it could be claimed that all students came to university with a more or less similar background with respect to learning English language. Moreover, samples of this study learnt English through presenting grammatical structures deductively, vocabulary memorization, reading texts with follow-up comprehension questions in high school. In short, all students learnt English language through old methods of teaching which do not lead to proficient English learners. As previously stated, sixteen TEFL students were selected out of which eight were selected from first year and the rest from final year. The first-year students were studying general English courses such as reading comprehension and writing courses, while the final-year students were studying more specialized courses such as language teaching methodology, theories of second language acquisition, and language testing.

### *2.2 Instrument*

Interview questions were the main instrument of this study. It provided data, which made the examination of L2 motivational variation within particular individuals possible. In other words, interviews gave explanatory data on L2 motivation. The main advantage of using interview as data collection tool lies in its strength to find out what we cannot directly observe, such as feelings and thoughts [11]. The questions were checked to ensure that they were free from any ambiguous words or any difficult and long structures, likely to interfere with respondents’ understanding. The advantage of such controlled questions is that they “ensure that the interview focuses on the target topic area and that the interview covers a well-defined domain, which makes the answers comparable across different respondents” [12]. Thus, the questions in the interview of this study mostly tapped participants’ one major facets of L2 motivational self-system, namely as ‘ideal L2 self’, and ‘integrativeness’ as the main concept in Gardner’s [7] L2 motivation concept. The questions highlighted whether participants had an L2 component in their ‘ideal self’ and explained what impact this imagination of an ideal English speaker might have on their effort to learn a second language. The questions also addressed some pragmatic, instrumental reasons for learning English plus students’ attitudes to learning environment and target-language culture. For instance, question number one (Do you ever visualize yourself as a person who is able to speak English? Explain), question number two (Do you ever imagine yourself living abroad, studying or working there? Explain), or question number three (How much do you think your desire to integrate with the culture of English-speaking countries motivate you to learn English?) directly ask interviewees to give their ideas about the topics, i.e. ‘ideal L2 self’ and ‘integrativeness’.

### 2.3 Procedure

Interviews were carried out with eight participants from each group in a classroom environment. The interviews followed a structured, face-to-face format. The researcher attempted to keep a friendly environment throughout each session as not to induce an inspector role. Each session started with a brief explanation of the interview purpose. Interviewees were informed of the research objectives. They were also informed, in advance, that the interview session would be audio-recorded and were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. For each question asked, they were given around one minute to think and then respond. They were also free to respond to the questions in either Persian or English. Eventually, each interview session lasted less than 15 minutes.

### 3. Data Analysis

After data collection, the first step to analyse the data was to transcribe them. Samples' responses were recorded and then were exactly converted to the text since it guarantees complete dependability of the results. Consequently, interviewees' every single utterance was carefully turned into sentences. Since interview questions provoked a set of controlled responses, they were brief and to the point, making the task of transcribing very easy. The next step of the data analysis was to compare interviewees' responses to extract similarities. To do so, copies of transcripts for both groups were provided and interviewees' responses for each item were carefully compared to find possible similarities and differences. For instance, for question number one, which addressed samples' 'ideal L2 self', a table with eight column for each group was drawn and interviewees' responses with their names were written in each column. This process was followed for each question and its responses. In this way, following students' responses to each question and comparing them within and across each group became an easy task. After carefully examining the responses for similarities and differences, points of similar and different responses were summarized in a separate table. Eventually, data were representative of interviewees' similar and different opinions regarding the interview questions.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The results for each group revealed interesting findings, some of which not in accordance with the findings in previous studies. For first-year participants, the results indicated that 'integrativeness' is a better predictor than 'ideal L2 self'. For instance, Ali, a first-year participant, specified an essential role for 'integrativeness': *"Sure it's my wish to be one of them and they consider me as one of them. I like their culture because they're very easy-going and it's so about their culture, their tradition. And I like to have contact with them. It is surely motivating for me."* Similarly, Amir, from the same group, also explained that integration with the target language community brings about a kind of motivation to learn English. He mentioned, *"If you want to learn English, it's very important you know about cultural customs and traditions. I like them. We have some differences but we have to be close to them if I want to learn English. It motivates me very much."* Moreover, Fatemeh held an idea of 'integrativeness' as an integral incentive to learn English: *"I like to be in their society, to get familiar with their culture and to be one of them. This is very motivating."*

Therefore, the above examples of students' actual responses, together with others', revealed that the result of this study contradicts with previous claims which considers 'ideal L2 self' as a superior concept. To put simply, the result is not consistent, at least for early stages of L2 learning, with what Dornyei [9] generally and, of course, theoretically believed. However, Dornyei [9] has acknowledged that 'self' is susceptible to change and suggested for further studies. This idea was also accentuated in recent publication by Dornyei and his colleagues (e.g. Dornyei and Ushioda, [13]).

However, this flexibility of ‘change’ in students’ L2 self, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is evident in final-year students’ responses to interview questions. Interview transcripts demonstrated that interviewees did not consider ‘integrativeness’ as a highly influential factor. Rather, results manifested a change in their desire to learn English from integration with an English-speaking community to identification of an L2 component in their ‘ideal self’. For instance, for question number one concerning ‘ideal L2 self’, Neda stated that she has always imagined herself as a proficient English teacher. She further claimed, *“Sometimes, this imagination is motivating.... I imagine I speak to someone that is good in English speaking and grammar, it is encourage me to continue and speak like that.”* Moreover, when she was asked to what extent she thought her imagination was important in learning English and why she thought so, she replied, *“very much. Because I read more, watch movies more, I practice more, I read and listen more.”* Another participant from the same group, Amir, stated that *“Most of the time when I am at home, I imagine I am in a foreign country, then I think with myself.... my parents want to left me to study abroad, that’s why I imagine I live there. Even I think I think I have a friend there and living in a foreign country. If you want to be successful, you should try more, that’s why I imagine to be a good listener and speaker.”* He continued as he said the importance of this imagination is *“very much, because when you think you speak good, when you think you are successful, you try your best. But if you don’t think about it, you never try to do anything.”*

Therefore, comparing the responses in both groups demonstrate the fact that students’ L2 motivation passes through a socially-directed dimension to a more psychologically-oriented one. Once students become more familiar with their academic life, in which English language is the central part, they tend to consider their ‘ideal self’ as a determining factor. The gap between their current self once compared with a kind of ‘L2 self’ they visualize in future is a great incentive to pushes them forward. Both groups agreed on the importance of ‘ideal L2 self’ and its contribution to direct their efforts to learn English language; however, the point of difference is not of a type but of a degree. While final-year participants responded in favour of ‘ideal L2 self’ and identified this variable as the main incentive in shaping their goals and consequently their effort to learn English, first-year participant reasoned that their efforts in learning English is mostly determined by their desire to integrate with the target language community. Some of them explained that language is a part of culture and once one embarks on learning a second language, s/he is inevitably engaged in cultural learning as well, an idea, which faded in the following years and is replaced by a desire to bridge the gap one feels between his current self and his ideal one.

Discussing the points above, it can be concluded that ‘self’ in general and ‘L2 self’ in particular is not a static concept; rather, its dynamic nature brings about different configurations in different context and with different subjects. Not only different subjects from various cultural and educational background need to be investigated addressing ‘ideal L2 self’ and the motivation arises from it, but also similar subjects should be investigated several times in order to yield a clearer picture of the formation of this concept. In this study, the comparison between the two groups, to some extent, shed light on the route the ‘L2 self’ passes. However, as previously mentioned, more studies of this kind certainly provide a better understanding of the formation of the concept.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the importance of two concepts in second language motivation, i.e. ‘integrativeness’ and ‘ideal L2 self’ in learning English. Sixteen TEFL students from Iran participated in this study. The results of the interview data analysis revealed that while ‘ideal L2 self’ is more important in learning English language for final-year students, ‘integrativeness’ is a stronger variable addressing English learning. Then, it was discussed that ‘L2 self’ is a dynamic concept and it might yield different results in different contexts and with different groups. It is also suggested that even more longitudinal studies, in future studies, will provide more in-depth views of how L2 motivation changes over time.

## References

- [1] Noels, K. A., Pelletier, L. G., Clement, R., Vallernad, R. J. (eds). Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning* 2000; 50, 57-85.
- [2] Gardner, R. C. Learning another language: A true social psychological experiment. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 1983; 219-239.
- [3] Crookes, G. and Schmidt, R. Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning* 1991; 41, 469–512.
- [4] Gardner, R. C. Integrative motivation and second language acquisition. In Dörnyei, Z. and Schmidt, R. editors, *Motivation and second language acquisition*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press; 2001, p. 1–20.
- [5] Gardner, R. C., Lambert, W. E. *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House; 1972.
- [6] Gardner, R. C., Smythe, P. C. Motivation and second-language acquisition. *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 1975; 31, 218-230.
- [7] Gardner, R. C. *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold; 1985.
- [8] Luckiman, Y. M. Motivation to learn and language proficiency. *Language Learning* 1972; 22: 261- 273.
- [9] Dörnyei, Z. *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2005.
- [10] Ushioda, E., Dörnyei, Z. Motivation. In Gass S., Mackey A. editors, *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition*. New York: Routledge 2012; p. 396-409.
- [11] Patton, M. Q. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. 2nd edition. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc; 1990.
- [12] Dörnyei, Z. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2007.
- [13] Dörnyei, Z., Ushioda, E. editors. *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters; 2009.